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friends and tell them you have a chance to win during this offer. The last week will take care of itself.

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The Contest Manager sincerely

rection. The citizens of Hays w take off their hats to the mayor ar council if they put this very impor

The Air Pilot

By Randall Parrish

Author of "Keith of the Border," "When Wilderness was King," Etc.

SYNOPSIS. In the smoking room of the Cedric, Hadley, an amateur aviator, tells of the mysterious disappearance of the Dessaud monoplane advertised to appear at the Chicago Aviation Meet. It seems that Phillip Dessaud, a French army officer had discovered a silent engine which the German secret agents were after. He registered at the Congress Hotel, was assigned to Room I-54 and that was the last heard of him. After Hadley ceased speaking one of the gentlemen offered his card and said: Messieurs, I am Phillip Dessaud, and smiling tells the story: He reached Chicago in the afternoon, drove with the French Consul to the Aviation Grounds, found everything in perfect condition, went back to the Congress Hotel, and while sitting in his room the phone suddenly rang and a lady's voice says, "Is that you, Phillip?" He protested he did not know Mademoiselle but largely out of curiosity consented to meet her in front of the Art Building at dusk. She pretended she had expected to meet Philip Houser. As the lady appeared to be in distress and hungry, Dessaud insisted that they go to a restaurant. There she confessed to him that she was Helen Probyn, a reporter, and had been assigned to interview him; her managing editor, a German named Schmitt, having outlined the plan she had followed; that after an interview of Schmitt with one Johann Brandt she had seen a draft on a Berlin bank to Schmitt for $1,000; and that from the peculiar nature of the assignment she was sure a scheme was being laid to get the secret of the silent monoplane.

In the face of this warning, Dessaud went with the girl to an underworld cafe, where she had been directed to take him. Schmitt, Brandt and others with them managed to meet Dessaud; they chatted a while over their wine and as Dessaud and the whole party were leaving a fake fight was staged in which Dessaud was knocked into insensibility. He was thrown into a taxi, taken to a hotel where on regaining consciousness he heard Brandt and Franzen discussing the incident.

From this conversation he learns the truth. Brandt by bribery or by force if necessary, meant to get the secret of the monoplane. Dessaud fought for his liberty but was overpowered. The hotel detective was attracted by the noise of the fight, but Brandt explained that Dessaud was a member of his party and was temporarily crazed by drink. With this explanation accepted it was possible for Brandt and his companions to take Dessaud out of the hotel without any interference whatever. After an unsuccessful attempt to gain the secrets by bribery Dessaud was taken out and put in a taxi. Helen Probyn after the cafe incident, became alarmed at what might have happened to Dessaud and had followed to the hotel. She was seen by Brandt who forcefully threw her into the taxi. The taxi was driven, to the southern part of the city to a fine old abandoned residence, the caretaker of which was being paid by Brandt. Here Dessaud fought again for the liberty of Miss Probyn and himself, but again was overpowered. Both Miss Probyn and Dessaud were now held prisoners under the same roof. Brandt again tried to get Dessaud's secret, but did not succeed. Dessaud was then placed in a cement room in the basement which the owner of the property had once used to confine his brother—a victim of alcoholism. Just before the door was locked Brandt said: "My offer still remains $25,000."

Dessaud began a systematic search for some way to get out, not only for himself but so he could aid Miss Probyn. He pushed the prison cot aside and found a place in the concrete which had been covered with cloth. This opened into a shaft which had evidently been used for a dumb waiter. Cautiously he made his way up the shaft to the kitchen. Going toward the front of the house he discovered Franzen and Swigert, the keeper. They had been drinking. Brandt had left for the Congress hotel to get Dessaud's grips. Franzen sent Swigert down to guard the prison—and, then courageous by reason of drink, made his way to Miss Probyn's room. Dessaud cautiously followed. Miss Probyn suspected Franzen's intentions but was unable to make him leave her room. Finally when she rushed for the door Franzen grabbed her and Dessaud sprang into the rooms and the struggle began, in which Franzen was thrown against a window ledge and killed. Dessaud and Miss Probyn, alarmed at new complications caused by Franzen's death began planning at once a systematic means of escape.

In groping about they came upon the body of a dead man—Ramon, one of Dessaud's mechanics. Evidently Ramon had been induced to drink to excess and had died as a result.

Brandt returned before they got away, but by making their way cautiously they were able to gain the doorway, only to be met by a policeman and a plain clothes man. By a clever ruse and some violence they were able to get away from them and dash away in Brandt's car.

SO I believe. With influence and money it could be hushed up later. Such things are done every day; but we might remain incarcerated for months. But how is it possible for us to escape? Every policeman in the city will be notified within an hour; the railroad depots, the boat landings will all be watched. They have our descriptions, our names, the license number of this machine. Even if we drive furiously into the country the telephone will warn every near-by town. There is not a loop-hole which will not be promptly closed. Even if those men do not succeed in breaking out of the house immediately, they can telephone the alarm to police headquarters. In all probability this has already been done. We are like rats in a trap."

She dropped her head into her hands with a gesture of despair, her voice breaking into a sob. I touched her gently, my other hand gripping the the wheel.

"There is a way out, if we can only make it in time," I said.

"A way!" and I could see the glitter of tears in her eyes, as she glanced up quickly. "You have thought of something?"

"Yes; a wild thought, perhaps, and yet possible, if we only have the nerve to carry the plan out. There are no police patroling the skies."

"The skies!" and she sat upright, facing me. "Do you mean your monoplane? Can that really be done? Would you dare venture upon such a trip in the dark?"

"I have flown in the night more than once," I answered a bit proudly, "and everything is ready, or was last evening. Without doubt De Vigne is there still, and the two of us would have no trouble in getting the machine out of the hangar. Starting it would be more difficult, but I believe it can be managed.

She remained gazing straight at me, as if fascinated.

"You would not be afraid?"

"Afraid!" I laughed. "Of what, Mademoiselle? It is my life; I have already made over a hundred ascensions—one more is nothing. It is you who must consider fear."

"Am I to go with you?"

"Did you imagine I would leave you behind? It hurts me to have you intimate that. I am not a coward; if I was alone involved in this matter I am not even sure I would endeavor to escape its consequences. I believe I could fight clear of these charges, even if Brandt dared to press them, and as to the secret of my monoplane, it is nothing to sacrifice greatly over. The world will know it all in a few months. I have not guarded it so much because of its value, but out of a sense of honor to my government, and because I could not yield to a German spy. So, unless you go with me, there will be no flight."

"I can stay and face it all—"

"No; not with my permission," and I grasped her hand, holding it firmly in mine at the rim of the wheel. "You are a woman; you cannot become involved in the publicity of such an escapade; you cannot be imprisoned under such charges, however false. Your reputation, your womanhood is at stake. I have drawn you into this affair; now I must extricate you without publicity. So far as I can see there is no other way possible. If we escape, if we vanish, not a word of this night's work will ever be made public. It will be hidden, hushed up; both Brandt and the police will see the necessity."

"But why do you care—for me?" she asked suddenly. "I have been the cause of it all; but for my interference you would be quietly sleeping at the hotel. I deserve punishment, Monsieur, and—and it cannot hurt so awfully. I am only a newspaper woman."

"You are far more than that to me; don't belittle yourself. I am not prejudiced, merely because you have been compelled to earn a living. I am a man, you a woman—nothing else matters now. You will come?"

"I cannot," pleadingly. "You should not ask; it would only make matters worse. Cannot you see it would?"

"I do not see, Mademoiselle. You are in as great danger here as I—even more from my point of view. You would be exposed to every indignity, to insult, to probable arrest. Am I to escape, and leave you to such a fate? I would forever despise myself. If you remain, I stay here with you."

"But, Monsieur—"

"No, wait—listen. You think I do not care; that I merely urge this out of courtesy. That is not true—it is because I do care. I respect, admire, love you! I have told it all."

The words were swift, impetuous. I had not meant to speak then, yet once started, could not be checked. She drew back, clinging to the seat, her eyes wide open, searching my face.

"You—you jest, Monsieur."

"No; look into my eyes, and see."

"Then you must be crazy, or," she laughed bitterly, "you presume on my unfortunate position. You think me of a class to whom such words can be spoken lightly?"

"You are angry?"

"No, not that. I am hurt, mortified, Monsieur. I—I have trusted tou too much; it—it is all my fault. You do not understand American girls. I—I never once dreamed you would think that of me."

"I think nothing wrong, Mademoiselle; nothing lightly," I protested warmly. "There was no disrespect in my words. I should not have spoken so suddenly, I admit, but the words could not be restrained. You believe me?"

"No, Monsieur, I do not. It is impossible that you can be in earnest. You are an officer of France, a man of high rank socially, of distinguished family. I am a girl you have met on the streets, unknown, obliged to toil for a livelihood. We have been thrown together in a peculiar manner, and, in some mysterious way, I have proven attractive to you. I understand what has occurred; I do not blame you. You have your European conception of such a situation. You feel at perfect liberty to make love to such as I. It is an honor done me; you are incapable of comprehending my indignation."

"You mistake, Mademoiselle."

"Do not protest—it is useless, perfectly useless! You have your world, Monsieur; I have mine. There is nothing in common between them. I might have gone with you, but for this. Now it is over." Her eyes deserted my face, and glanced ahead, searching the street; the expression of her voice changed. "I know where we are now, and it will be safer for us to leave the car. The police will be searching for that, and will know its number. You will do as I say?"

"Certainly."

She pointed forward to the left.

"There is an open court yonder, surrounded by houses, a small, private park. You can see the open gate under that electric light. Drive the machine in there, and turn to the right, so it will be concealed by the wall. Yes, this is the place; now turn off the power. No one will discover it here until after daylight."

She sprang to the ground, without waiting for assistance, and I followed; determined not to permit her to escape without further explanation, yet embarrassed by her prompt action. It was very still, the sky slightly overcast, the street beyond the wall deserted. The light over the gateway streamed around us, and I could clearly distinguish her face.

"Mademoiselle, you will listen, you will hear me," I began eagerly. "Surely you have found me a gentleman."

"According to your standards—yes," she returned frankly. "I have already said I did not blame you. The indiscretion has been mine; you have every reason to think lightly of me. But now I must protect myself." She held out her hand. "Let us be friends, Monsieur, and speak of this no longer. Do I have your promise to respect my wish?"

I took the hand in both of mine, but my lips failed to respond. There was something in the uplifted face I failed to understand.

"Why do you hesitate? Must I be more explicit?"

"Your meaning is not altogether clear," I managed to say. "I am your friend always, but cannot surrender the hope of being more."

"The future is a wide sea, and we sail for different ports. 'Tis not likely our ships will ever meet again, but it is better to part with pleasant rather than unpleasant memories. Why should you insist on thus—thus insulting me?"

"Insult!" the harsh word stung me like a whip. "Is the love of a man insult?"

"Sometimes—yes. What else can it be now? You know nothing of me, except my name. Twelve hours ago you were not even aware of my existence. Twelve hours more, and I will remain but a vague memory. It is mockery for you to talk of love; you play with what to me is sacred. Please spare me from more. I—I appeal to you, Monsieur, as a gentleman."

I bowed, releasing her hand.

"I cannot refuse, Mademoiselle; yet you are wrong—I have known you all my life."

"How absurd!"

"But it is not. You are the realization of a dream. I knew last evening, as we sat at table together, this was so. Time has nothing to do with love, unless to strengthen it. These few hours have done more to reveal your nature to me, my nature to you, than would years in a drawing room. At least know that I am in earnest; that I speak from the heart."

She stood motionless, looking straight at me, her breath quickening.

"But who am I?" she asked. "You do not even know."

"Fortunately," with a smile, "I do not even care. You are yourself, which is enough."

She laughed, breaking the tenseness of her attitude by a little gesture of dismissal.

"How foolish this all is, Monsieur! I cannot afford to dream such dreams. Life has always been most practical to me. Nor can you now. We forget where we are, the conditions surrounding us, the peril of delay. The coming of daylight will mean the arrest of both."

"Very true, yet if arrest is to be the portion of either, I prefer to be the one," I said quietly. "You speak as though you wished me to get away free, and desert you to the police?"

"No; I have friends who will shelter me. I am not alarmed about myself in the least. It will be unpleasant, perhaps, and I may have to leave the city later. But with you it is different. You are a stranger and helpless. There is a chance for you to escape if you act promptly—at least you have encouraged me to think so—and I am simply imploring you to accept it before it is too late. If you will not for your own sake, then do this for me, Monsieur. You speak of my safety, my reputation; do you not realize what your arrest would mean to me? It would inevitably lead to exposure; no matter how closely your lips were sealed, Brandt and those

returned Sunday night. | the Free Press office. | at the Hays City Drug Store.